

# I-10 one of 6 U.S. routes due for more truck traffic

**'Corridors of Future' set for widening, other projects**

**By Andrea Kelly**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

As one of six interstate highways identified to become a magnet for heavy truck traffic, Interstate 10 could undergo more widening or other changes in the next few years.

The U.S. Department of Transportation wants to route truck traffic onto specific highways so congestion can be more easily dealt with, Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters said. The six selected highways will benefit from increased funding so they can handle the extra load.

Spending options include adding truck-only lanes, building new roads, building bypasses and adding technology to road systems as the program — called Corridors of the Future — works toward its goal of reducing congestion and improving freight efficiency.

Interstate 10 is slated to receive just \$8.6 million for the whole stretch, from California to Florida. However, Peters also is encouraging local governments to work with the private sector, which could mean more investments.

The other Corridors of the Future roads are I-95 from Florida to the Canadian border; I-70 in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio; I-15 in Utah, Arizona, Nevada and California; I-5 in California, Oregon and Washington; I-69 in Michigan and Indiana. Interstate 69 is planned to become a key trade corridor linking Canada and the Mexican border at Texas.

"The trade and tourism corridors are becoming so congested that they are having an effect on our economy," Peters said while in Tucson last week. "We need to do something about congestion."

Though the Arizona Department of Transportation is studying a possible bypass to reroute trucks and cross-country traffic from east of Tucson to west of Phoenix to avoid those metropolitan areas, Peters said such a bypass would be a long-term solution.

"Congestion is one of our most compelling problems," Peters said. "What we want are good near-term solutions."

The department decided to use its discretionary funding on solving congestion because it's only getting worse, she said.

While Tucson could see an increase in truck traffic due to the program, there are no immediate plans to spend any extra money here.

The plans are to use \$4 million to widen I-10 in Arizona from Interstate 8 to the Gila River Indian Community, south of metropolitan Phoenix, and \$4.6 million to widen a section of I-10 in Louisiana.

The Pima Association of Governments, which works with all the local governments in the county, lobbied for Interstate 10 to be included in the plan.

"The (PAG governing) board made that decision because of the importance of I-10; it's critically important to our community," said Gary Hayes, PAG's executive director.

It's important to focus on the economic future of Tucson and the surrounding areas, he said.

"The emphasis deals with freight movement, and obviously I-10 deals with freight movement from west to east and from Mexico. That's only going to increase," Hayes said.

## DID YOU KNOW . . .

Interstate 10 stretches more than 2,400 miles across eight states, passing through 17 major urban areas. About 700 miles of the route is in urban areas, and about half of that already is considered congested. The rest will be within 20 years.

In Arizona, I-10 covers 392 miles, second in mileage only to Texas, which has 882 miles of the route.

Source: Corridors of the Future fact sheets

The association decided to promote I-10 as one of the candidates for the program because it could lead to more funding to deal with an already growing congestion issue, he said.

Hayes said some of the strategies that have worked in other communities could work in Arizona, such as restricting trucks to certain lanes.

PAG hired local consultant Joe Herrick to help get other cities, states and regional governments along I-10 to support the proposal. Herrick also was involved in the Regional Transportation Authority campaign here last year.

The selection of I-10 as part of this nationwide freight system provides new revenue streams, Herrick said. This first round of funding will be "seed money" for the local governments to build on, he said.

It will likely also help the Arizona Department of Transportation fund improvements along I-10 in Arizona, Herrick said.

It only made sense for I-10 to be one of the corridors included, especially because it stretches from coast to coast and provides access to the Gulf of Mexico, Hayes said.

"It gives us another hand to deal with what we know will be increased traffic coming through," he said.

Formal agreements for each interstate are to be finalized next spring.

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